

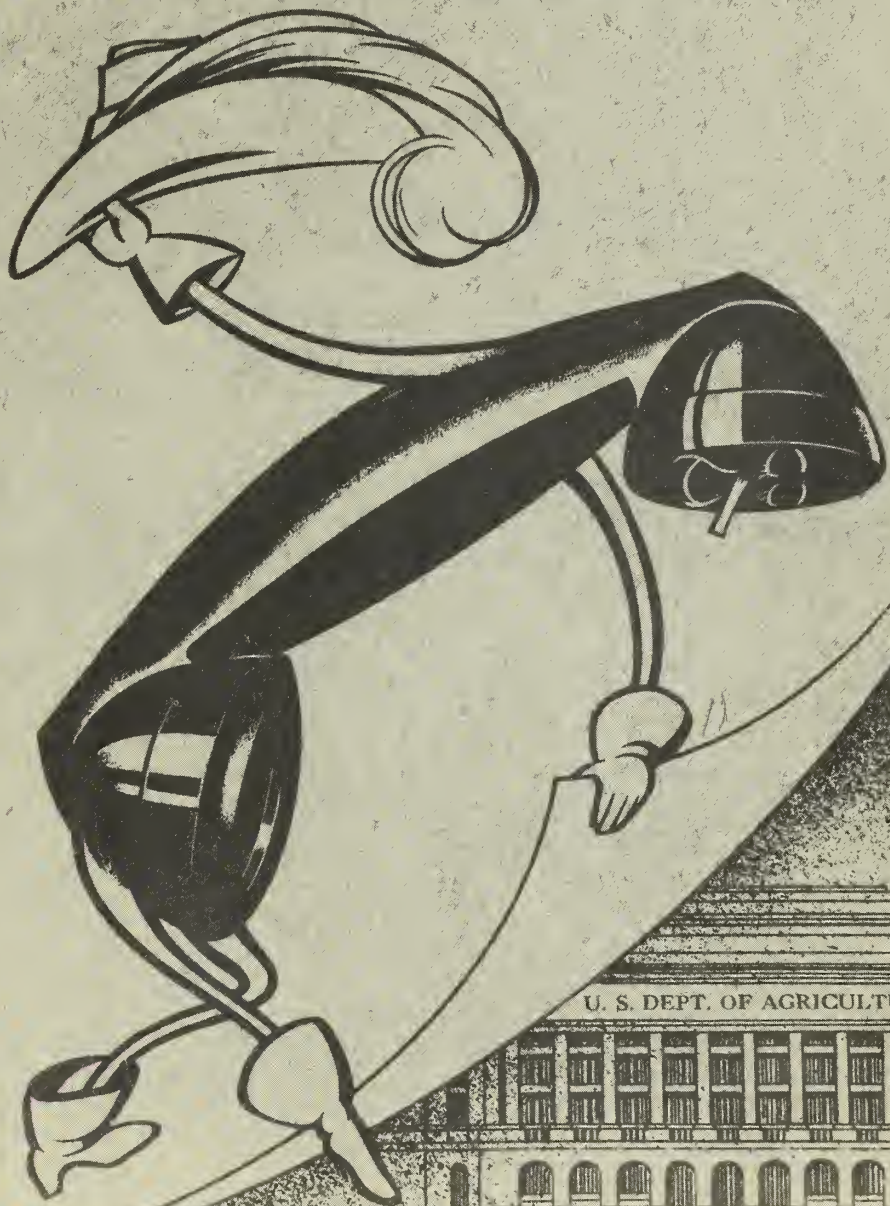
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p432A

UNITED STATES
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL
DIVISION OF TRAINING

Telephone Manners



U. S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

RESPONSIBILITY FOR EMPLOYEE TRAINING

Employee training includes any learning process through which employees become more effective in their work by developing appropriate attitudes and habits and increasing their knowledge and skills. It is the policy of the Department that each executive and supervisor be directly responsible for employee training, that is, for helping members of his staff learn to do better work.

TELEPHONE MANNERS

To Telephone Users of the United States Department of Agriculture:

At least 100,000,000 telephone calls—an average of 6 each day for each telephone user—were made and received in the Department of Agriculture, Washington and field, last year. Each call, whether the Department's representative happened to be an executive, a secretary, a scientific specialist, or a clerk, offered these alternatives:

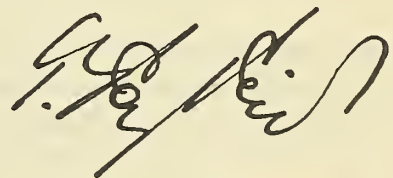
1. Being helpful, of service to the public and creating a good impression, or
2. Being simply a waste of time and creating a bad or indifferent impression.

It happens that the impression made by one individual in one telephone call may become the telephone caller's total impression of the whole Department.

Superficial and unfair? Often yes, but why debate such questions when it is clear that good telephone habits can be cultivated by everyone. It isn't hard. The first and most important rule is to put yourself in the place of the person at the other end of the wire.

Many Department workers have excellent telephone techniques, but there are few who cannot benefit by studying and applying the suggestions in this pamphlet. These suggestions have been agreed upon as standard good practice by officials of telephone companies and other organizations.

The Box Score at the end will help each of us uncover some weaknesses of which we may be unaware—it may help reveal us as others hear us.



Director of Personnel.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL DIVISION OF TRAINING

I. PROMPTNESS



Do you like to wait for others?

Do they enjoy waiting for you?

Waiting weeks for a letter, minutes for someone late for his appointment or seconds on the telephone are all irritating.

The telephone is for speedy communication, and so there is much less tolerance of delays in its use. Delay creates impatience which handicaps you before you start talking. But promptness gives the impression that you and your organization are on your toes, and also that you respect the time of the person on the other end of the wire.

Promptness is partly an attitude and partly a habit. It is worthwhile to earn for yourself, your office, and your Department the reputation of prompt, businesslike service.

Answer immediately

Lift the telephone at the end of the first ring whenever you can. Try to answer before the telephone rings twice. Be sure to answer before the third ring.

Speak into the telephone right away. Some people slip into the annoying habit of taking up the telephone while continuing a conversation with someone else in the office. When you feel you must continue such a conversation for a moment longer, ask the caller to "Excuse me for just a moment, please." And be sure it is just a moment.

Come quickly when called

When you are signalled or called to the telephone try to take up the telephone within 5 seconds, the length of time between two telephone rings.

Be on the line when the other person answers

Except at Hallowe'en, would you ring a man's doorbell and then walk away? Many people do essentially that when they have someone else get persons on the wire for them before they are ready to talk. This practice makes them appear more business-like only to themselves.

If you are ever guilty of this, you should realize that to the person called, it simply implies that you think your time is more valuable than his. He picks up his telephone and says, "Hello, John, this is Jim," then a voice answers, "Just a moment, I'll put him on," and then Jim asks himself, "Well, who does he think he is?" as he simmers to a boil.

This does not mean you must be on the line for the entire calling process. It does mean that you should take up the telephone before the other man answers. Try collecting your thoughts while waiting for the man you are calling so as to save his time and yours *after* you start talking.

Return promptly all calls received in your absence

Each call received in your absence should be noted with the name of the person, his number, time of the call, message, and the name or initials of the person who took the call. Make these calls your first items of business when you return to your office.

When you go out, leave word as to where you can be reached and when you expect to return so that anyone trying to reach you by telephone may know. If you must be away from your office longer than anticipated, keep in touch with your office to find out if there are any important calls you should answer.

Leave the telephone "covered" so that it will always be answered

Whenever possible, someone should always be on hand to answer your telephone. It is irritating to the caller to get no answer. It is important for you and your work to receive all calls.

Plan your conversation before calling others

Before ringing someone, decide what you want to say, be ready to talk promptly and to come to the point.

Be prepared to render quick service

Have paper and pencil ready to take notes so you won't have to fumble around while the other person waits.

Keep track of current activities. Have reference manuals and other source materials always at hand.

When it takes a little time to get the desired information, keep the caller posted or offer to call him back in order to save his time.

II. IDENTIFICATION

The old guessing game is out of style. Both parties to a conversation want to know immediately either to whom they are talking or whether they have the right person.

When answering the telephone

You will please the caller at the start by dropping the old "Hello" habit and telling who you are. This practice saves telephone dueling and does not open the way for that irritating question, "Who's this?" Try some such openers as these:

"Personnel, Jones speaking."

"Audit Section, Wilson speaking."

"This is Katapultopolis."

"How are you, Bill? This is Joe Smith."

The hackneyed "Hello" conveys no more meaning than the traditional English: "Are you there?"

When making a call

Identify yourself immediately. When you visit someone you are either seen by him when the door opens, or your name is announced to the person you wish to see. You always sign your letters. But do you always announce your name when you make a call on the phone? It is courteous, time-saving, and informative to start your calls with phrases like these:

"Is Mr. Brown there? Mr. Smith is calling."

"This is Jones in Personnel calling Mr. Dawson."

"This is Williams in Service Section calling Mr. Jordan."

Old time- and Patience-Wasters

"Hello."

"Hello, is Mr. Jones there?"

"There's no Mr. Jones here."

"What number is this?"

"What number are you calling?"

"I'm calling branch 987" —

BANG! goes the receiver.

"Hello."

"Is this Mr. Lewis' office?"

"Yes."

"Is he in?"

"Who is calling?"

"Mr. Green. I'd like to talk with Mr. Lewis."

"I'll put him on."

(Secretary: "Telephone, Mr. Lewis.")

"Hello."

"Hello."

"Is that you, Mr. Green?"

"Yes. Are you Mr. Lewis?"

"Yes. What's on your mind?"



New Time- and Temper-Savers

"Accounts Section, Mr. Smith speaking."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I have the wrong number."

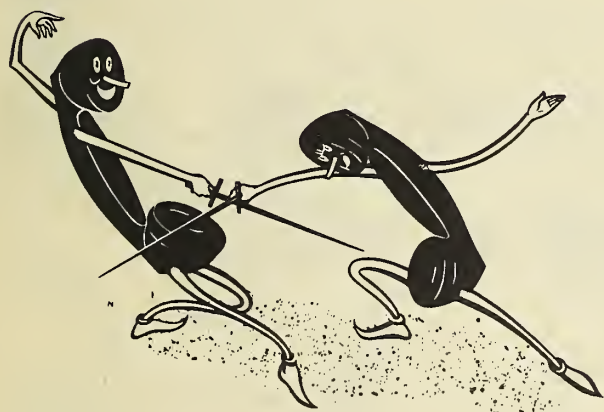
"Mr. Lewis' office."

"This is Green. May I talk with Mr. Lewis?"

"Yes. One moment please."

(Secretary: "Mr. Lewis, Mr. Green is calling.")

"How are you, Green? Lewis speaking."



This space represents the time saved for pleasant conduct of government business. Learn to identify yourself in the first words you say.



"We don't handle that."

"He's not in."

"You had better talk to somebody in Jones' section; they might know."

Jones' Section

Mr. Brown

"I suggest that you ask Mr. Jones."

"I'm sorry, but we don't have that information here."

"Can you call back later and speak to Mr. Brown?"

III. THE RUN-AROUND

Thousands of persons ranging from school children to Senators telephone the Department with requests for information each year. None of them like to repeat the same story to several different people, each of whom responds with something like this:

"I'm sorry, but we don't handle that. Perhaps the Flowering Cactus Section could help you."

This is undoubtedly one of the greatest annoyances to the inquiring public. It reflects on the reputation of each office, Agency, the whole Department, and the Federal Government. The problem of buck-passing is not easy, but it is basic to any solution that every employee be well informed about the work of his bureau and of the Department, and that he be interested in helping all callers.

Handle the call yourself if you can

Look on requests for information as a chance to make a friend and render a service. Be quick to help and slow to throw off the responsibility the caller has placed on you to answer his questions. But be sure you have the facts complete and straight.

If you are unable to answer his question immediately, try something like this:

"I'm sorry I don't have that information, but I'll be glad to get it and call you back."

or

"I am sorry, but Mr. Brown of the Service Section handles that. Shall I tell him what you want and ask him to call you?"

Transfer calls only to persons who you know can satisfy the caller

Frequently calls must be transferred, but this should not be done just on the chance that the next person may have the information needed. If it is necessary to transfer a call give the number and name to the person who is calling and then give the number to the operator. Be sparing, however, in transferring calls. You might say:

"I'm sorry, but Miss Blue can answer that better than I. Would you like me to transfer you to her? Her extension is 6789."

IV. COURTESY



“Phone as you would be phoned” is a good motto to remember and practice.

Habitual thoughtfulness for the wishes and feelings of others is the essence of good telephone manners.

Practice asking questions tactfully

If the person calling does not give his name and you do not recognize his voice, it is important to use a question which does not seem peremptory.

Nosey and Abrupt

“Who are you?”

“Who’s calling?”

“Who’s this?”

Better Way of Asking

“May I tell him who is calling, please?”

Try to be helpful

When the person asked for is not available, it takes only a little extra effort to say so in a way that does not sound indifferent or rude.

Indifferent or Rude

“He’s in conference.”

“He’s busy.”

(Does he telephone only when loafing?)

“He’s not in,” or “He’s out!”

Interested or Helpful

“He’s in a meeting now. I’ll be glad to take in a note, or he could call you back after the meeting.”

“He has a caller now. Do you wish me to interrupt, or should he call you later?”

“He’s not at his desk right now. May I have him call you when he returns?”

Choose the right words

Bluntness may save time, but not nerves. Bossiness is always disliked.

Blunt or Bossy

"You must."

"You can't."

"You will have to."

"There is a rule that you must."

The Polite Phrase

"Please."

"Thank you."

"I am sorry."

"I shall be glad to."

Close every conversation before hanging up

It is the responsibility of the caller to bring his call to a close. In a face-to-face conversation you would not end just by walking away or closing the door. It is a good habit to end every call with a closing word or phrase such as "goodbye," or "thank you for calling."

V. VOICE IMPRESSION

Your voice, what you say, and how you say it, are what reveal YOU, and your Department, Agency, Division, and Section, to the person at the other end of the line. Without the aid of the gestures and facial expressions of face-to-face personality, you depend entirely on your voice.

Try to sound pleasant

We all like a smile when we greet a friend or meet a stranger. We all like a friendly tone in our letters, especially from the bill collector. Similarly a pleasant and cheerful telephone voice is a prized asset for any person or any office. You can improve your voice by listening carefully to others and trying to nourish the inflections you like and to weed out those you do not care for.

Speak clearly and naturally

Strive for distinct diction. Talk in a normal tone and manner. Try not to strain the listener with mumbling or to jar his ears off with shouting. If listeners ask you, "What was that?" or say, "I'm sorry, I didn't get that," it is a hint to take yourself in hand. Either you should form your words better, speak more slowly, or speak more directly into the mouthpiece. For best results the mouthpiece should be held securely within half an inch of the lips.

Be alert and interested

To the person on the other end of the line, the tone of your voice is the tone of your office and of your whole organization. He appreciates every evidence of helpful interest. He is quick to note every sign of boredom and impatience. His impression of you and your office is always influenced by the sound of your voice.

HOW DOES THE OTHER PERSON PICTURE YOU AND YOUR OFFICE?

Uncivil Servant



Do you sound

Expressionless?	Impatient?
Mechanical?	Inattentive?
Indifferent?	Repelling?

Do people think your office is

Bureaucratic?
Wrapped in red tape?
Rude and inefficient?

OR

Civil Servant



Do you sound

Pleasant?	Cheerful?
Friendly?	Interested?
Cordial?	Helpful?

Do people think your office is

Rendering real service?
Getting work out on time?
Human and businesslike?

SUPERVISOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

Telephone Teamwork of _____ and _____
(Supervisor)

Several telephone practices need to be worked out between each supervisor and the person who makes and takes calls for him, because individual offices have different problems and preferences. It is important to record these agreed-upon practices in the blanks below so that they will be clearly understood and remembered.

Receiving calls

1. What should I say when answering the telephone? _____

2. Does Mr. _____ want to know who is calling before he is put on the line? Yes _____ No _____ If so, how shall I ask _____

3. Under what circumstance does Mr. _____ ***not*** want to be interrupted with telephone calls? _____

4. Should I listen in on calls? _____ If so, all calls? _____
Which ones? _____

5. Of the calls that come into this office, what types should I handle myself? _____

Making calls

1. How should I identify Mr. _____ in making his calls? _____

2. How and when do I signal Mr. _____ to get him on the line before the person he asked me to call, answers? _____

BOX SCORE ON TELEPHONE HABITS

Do you hit home runs, or do you foul and strike out occasionally in your daily telephone relations with the public and with your fellow employees? Spot your weak points on this Box Score, and then check with the suggestions set forth in the previous pages for tips on telephoning techniques.

HOW: Put a check for each question in whichever column to the right under the heading **HOME RUN**, **BASE HIT**, **FOUL BALL**, or **STRIKE OUT**, best fits your answer to the question.

DO I REGULARLY:



Promptness

Answer before the second ring?
Return promptly calls received in my absence?



Identification

Answer by identifying myself or my office, not by "hello"?

The run-around

Give caller the information he wants or, if unable to do so, transfer him directly to the person who can? Instead of transferring calls to others who might also pass the buck, get the information and call back?



Courtesy

Avoid such abrupt phrases as "Who's calling?"
Use such polite phrases as "Please," "Thank you," "I'm sorry?"
Definitely close calls with "Goodbye," or similar phrase?



Voice impression

Sound interested, awake, helpful, friendly, pleasant?
 Speak distinctly so as to be clearly understood?
 Sound like a member of a human and businesslike office?

HOW TO FIND YOUR SCORE: Add up checks in each column to get **TOTALS**. Multiply each total by number beneath. Then add up the **RESULTS** to get your **SCORE**. How do you rate? Over 90—**BIG LEAGUE**. 80-90—**BUSH LEAGUE**. 70-80—**SAN**

TOTALS
MULTIPLIERS
RESULTS
SCORE

8	6	4	2
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Below 70—BENCHED.

LEARN WHAT IS IN THE PAMPHLET—PRACTICE WHAT YOU LEARN

